TWELFTH SCENE.--DRURY LANE.

CHAPTER THE FORTY-FOURTH. - THE LETTER AND THE LAW.

THE many-toned murmur of the current of London life--flowing through the murky channel of Drury Lane--found its muffled way from the front room to the back. Piles of old music lumbered the dusty floor. Stage masks and weapons, and portraits of singers and dancers, hung round the walls. An empty violin case in one corner faced a broken bust of Rossini in another. A frameless print, representing the Trial of Queen Caroline, was pasted over the fireplace. The chairs were genuine specimens of ancient carving in oak. The table was an equally excellent example of dirty modern deal. A small morsel of drugget was on the floor; and a large deposit of soot was on the ceiling. The scene thus presented, revealed itself in the back drawing-room of a house in Drury Lane, devoted to the transaction of musical and theatrical business of the humbler sort. It was late in the afternoon, on Michaelmas-day. Two persons were seated together in the room: they were Anne Silvester and Sir Patrick Lundie.

The opening conversation between them--comprising, on one side, the narrative of what had happened at Perth and at Swanhaven; and, on the other, a statement of the circumstances attending the separation of Arnold and Blanche--had come to an end. It rested with Sir Patrick to lead the way to the next topic. He looked at his companion, and hesitated.

"Do you feel strong enough to go on?" he asked. "If you would prefer to rest a little, pray say so."

"Thank you, Sir Patrick. I am more than ready, I am eager to go on. No words can say how anxious I feel to be of some use to you, if I can. It rests entirely with your experience to show me how."

"I can only do that, Miss Silvester, by asking you without ceremony for all the information that I want. Had you any object in traveling to London, which you have not mentioned to me yet? I mean, of course, any object with which I have a claim (as Arnold Brinkworth's representative) to be acquainted?"

"I had an object, Sir Patrick. And I have failed to accomplish it."

"May I ask what it was?"

"It was to see Geoffrey Delamayn."

Sir Patrick started. "You have attempted to see him! When?"

"This morning."

"Why, you only arrived in London last night!"

"I only arrived," said Anne, "after waiting many days on the journey. I was obliged to rest at Edinburgh, and again at York--and I was afraid I had given Mrs. Glenarm time enough to get to Geoffrey Delamayn before me."

"Afraid?" repeated Sir Patrick. "I understood that you had no serious intention of disputing the scoundrel with Mrs. Glenarm. What motive could possibly have taken you his way?"

"The same motive which took me to Swanhaven."

"What! the idea that it rested with Delamayn to set things right? and that you might bribe him to do it, by consenting to release him, so far as your claims were concerned?"

"Bear with my folly, Sir Patrick, as patiently as you can! I am always alone now; and I get into a habit of brooding over things. I have been brooding over the position in which my misfortunes have placed Mr. Brinkworth. I have been obstinate--unreasonably obstinate--in believing that I could prevail with Geoffrey Delamayn, after I had failed with Mrs. Glenarm. I am obstinate about it still. If he would only have heard me, my madness in going to Fulham might have had its excuse." She sighed bitterly, and said no more.

Sir Patrick took her hand.

"It has its excuse," he said, kindly. "Your motive is beyond reproach. Let me add--to quiet your mind--that, even if Delamayn had been willing to hear you, and had accepted the condition, the result would still have been the same. You are quite wrong in supposing that he has only to speak, and to set this matter right. It has passed entirely beyond his control. The mischief was done when Arnold Brinkworth spent those unlucky hours with you at Craig Fernie."

"Oh, Sir Patrick, if I had only known that, before I went to Fulham this morning!"

She shuddered as she said the words. Something was plainly associated with her visit to Geoffrey, the bare remembrance of which shook her nerves. What was it? Sir Patrick resolved to obtain an answer to that question, before he ventured on proceeding further with the main object of the interview.

"You have told me your reason for going to Fulham," he said. "But I have not heard what happened there yet."

Anne hesitated. "Is it necessary for me to trouble you about that?" she asked--with evident reluctance to enter on the subject.

"It is absolutely necessary," answered Sir Patrick, "because Delamayn is concerned in it."

Anne summoned her resolution, and entered on her narrative in these words:

"The person who carries on the business here discovered the address for me," she began. "I had some difficulty, however, in finding the house. It is little more than a cottage; and it is quite lost in a great garden, surrounded by high walls. I saw a carriage waiting. The coachman was walking his horses up and down--and he showed me the door. It was a high wooden door in the wall, with a grating in it. I rang the bell. A servant-girl opened the grating, and looked at me. She refused to let me in. Her mistress had ordered her to close the door on all strangers--especially strangers who were women. I contrived to pass some money to her through the grating, and asked to speak to her mistress. After waiting some time, I saw another face behind the bars--and it struck me that I recognized it. I suppose I was nervous. It startled me. I said, 'I think we know each other.' There was no answer. The door was suddenly opened--and who do you think stood before me?"

"Was it somebody I know?"

"Yes."

"Man? or woman?"

"It was Hester Dethridge."

"Hester Dethridge!"

"Yes. Dressed just as usual, and looking just as usual--with her slate hanging at her side."

"Astonishing! Where did I last see her? At the Windygates station, to be sure--going to London, after she had left my sister-in-law's service. Has she accepted another place--without letting me know first, as I told her?"

"She is living at Fulham."

"In service?"

"No. As mistress of her own house."

"What! Hester Dethridge in possession of a house of her own? Well! well! why shouldn't she have a rise in the world like other people? Did she let you in?"

"She stood for some time looking at me, in that dull strange way that she has. The servants at Windygates always said she was not in her right mind--and you will say, Sir Patrick, when you hear what happened, that the servants were not mistaken. She must be mad. I said, 'Don't you remember me?' She lifted her slate, and wrote, 'I remember you, in a dead swoon at Windygates House.' I was quite unaware that she had been present when I fainted in the library. The discovery startled me--or that dreadful, dead-cold look that she has in her eyes startled me--I don't know which. I couldn't speak to her just at first. She wrote on her slate again--the strangest question--in these words: 'I said, at the time, brought to it by a man. Did I say true?' If the question had been put in the usual way, by any body else, I should have considered it too insolent to be noticed. Can you understand my answering it, Sir Patrick? I can't understand it myself, now--and yet I did answer. She forced me to it with her stony eyes. I said 'yes.'"

"Did all this take place at the door?"

"At the door."

"When did she let you in?"

"The next thing she did was to let me in. She took me by the arm, in a rough way, and drew me inside the door, and shut it. My nerves are broken; my courage is gone. I crept with cold when she touched me. She dropped my arm. I stood like a child, waiting for what it pleased her to say or do next. She rested her two hands on her sides, and took a long look at me. She made a horrid dumb sound--not as if she was angry; more, if such a thing could be, as if she was satisfied--pleased even, I should have said, if it had been any body but Hester Dethridge. Do you understand it?"

"Not yet. Let me get nearer to understanding it by asking something before you go on. Did she show any attachment to you, when you were both at Windygates?"

"Not the least. She appeared to be incapable of attachment to me, or to any body."

"Did she write any more questions on her slate?"

"Yes. She wrote another question under what she had written just before. Her mind was still running on my fainting fit, and on the 'man' who had 'brought me to it.' She held up the slate; and the words were these: 'Tell me how he served you, did he knock you down?' Most people would have laughed at the question. I was startled by it. I told her, No. She shook her head as if she didn't believe me. She wrote on her slate, 'We are loth to own it when they up with their fists and beat us--ain't we?' I said, 'You are quite wrong.' She went on obstinately with her writing. 'Who is the man?'--was her next question. I had control enough over myself to decline telling her that. She opened the door, and pointed to me to go out. I made a sign entreating her to wait a little. She went back, in her impenetrable way, to the writing on the slate--still about the 'man.' This time, the question was plainer still. She had evidently placed her own interpretation of my appearance at the house. She wrote, 'Is it the man who lodges here?' I saw that she would close the door on me if I didn't answer. My only chance with her was to own that she had guessed right. I said 'Yes. I want to see him.' She took me by the arm, as roughly as before--and led me into the house."

"I begin to understand her," said Sir Patrick. "I remember hearing, in my brother's time, that she had been brutally ill-used by her husband. The association of id eas, even in her confused brain, becomes plain, if you bear that in mind. What is her last remembrance of you? It is the remembrance of a fainting woman at Windygates."

"Yes."

"She makes you acknowledge that she has guessed right, in guessing that a man was, in some way, answerable for the condition in which she found you. A swoon produced by a shock indicted on the mind, is a swoon that she doesn't understand. She looks back into her own experience, and associates it with the exercise of actual physical brutality on the part of the man. And she sees, in you, a reflection of her own sufferings and her own case. It's curious--to a student of human nature. And it explains, what is otherwise unintelligible--her overlooking her own instructions to the servant, and letting you into the house. What happened next?"

"She took me into a room, which I suppose was her own room. She made signs, offering me tea. It was done in the strangest way--without the least appearance of kindness. After what you have just said to me, I think I can in some degree interpret what was going on in her mind. I believe she felt a hard-hearted interest in seeing a woman whom she supposed to be as unfortunate as she had once been herself. I declined taking any tea, and tried to return to the subject of what I wanted in the house. She paid no heed to me. She pointed round the room; and then took me to a window, and pointed round the garden--and then made a sign indicating herself. 'My house; and my garden'--that was what she meant. There were four men in the garden--and Geoffrey Delamayn was one of them. I made another attempt to tell her that I wanted to speak to him. But, no! She had her own idea in her mind. After beckoning to me to leave the window, she led the way to the fire-place, and showed me a sheet of paper with writing on it, framed and placed under a glass, and hung on the wall. She seemed, I thought, to feel some kind of pride in her framed manuscript. At any rate, she insisted on my reading it. It was an extract from a will."

"The will under which she had inherited the house?"

"Yes. Her brother's will. It said, that he regretted, on his death-bed, his estrangement from his only sister, dating from the time when she had married in defiance of his wishes and against his advice. As a proof of his sincere desire to be reconciled with her, before he died, and as some compensation for the sufferings that she had endured at the hands of her deceased husband, he left her an income of two hundred pounds a year, together with the use of his house and garden, for her lifetime. That, as well as I remember, was the substance of what it said."

"Creditable to her brother, and creditable to herself," said Sir Patrick. "Taking her odd character into consideration, I understand her liking it to be

seen. What puzzles me, is her letting lodgings with an income of her own to live on."

"That was the very question which I put to her myself. I was obliged to be cautious, and to begin by asking about the lodgers first--the men being still visible out in the garden, to excuse the inquiry. The rooms to let in the house had (as I understood her) been taken by a person acting for Geoffrey Delamayn--his trainer, I presume. He had surprised Hester Dethridge by barely noticing the house, and showing the most extraordinary interest in the garden."

"That is quite intelligible, Miss Silvester. The garden you have described would be just the place he wanted for the exercises of his employer--plenty of space, and well secured from observation by the high walls all round. What next?"

"Next, I got to the question of why she should let her house in lodgings at all. When I asked her that, her face turned harder than ever. She answered me on her slate in these dismal words: 'I have not got a friend in the world. I dare not live alone.' There was her reason! Dreary and dreadful, Sir Patrick, was it not?"

"Dreary indeed! How did it end? Did you get into the garden?"

"Yes--at the second attempt. She seemed suddenly to change her mind; she opened the door for me herself. Passing the window of the room in which I had left her, I looked back. She had taken her place, at a table before the window, apparently watching for what might happen. There was something about her, as her eyes met mine (I can't say what), which made me feel uneasy at the time. Adopting your view, I am almost inclined to think now, horrid as the idea is, that she had the expectation of seeing me treated as she had been treated in former days. It was actually a relief to me--though I knew I was going to run a serious risk--to lose sight of her. As I got nearer to the men in the garden, I heard two of them talking very earnestly to Geoffrey Delamayn. The fourth person, an elderly gentleman, stood apart from the rest at some little distance. I kept as far as I could out of sight, waiting till the talk was over. It was impossible for me to help hearing it. The two men were trying to persuade Geoffrey Delamayn to speak to the elderly gentleman. They pointed to him as a famous medical man. They reiterated over and over again, that his opinion was well worth having--"

Sir Patrick interrupted her. "Did they mention his name?" he asked.

"Yes. They called him Mr. Speedwell."

"The man himself! This is even more interesting, Miss Silvester, than you suppose. I myself heard Mr. Speedwell warn Delamayn that he was in broken health, when we were visiting together at Windygates House last month. Did he do as the other men wished him? Did he speak to the surgeon?"

"No. He sulkily refused--he remembered what you remember. He said, 'See the man who told me I was broken down?--not I!' After confirming it with an oath, he turned away from the others. Unfortunately, he took the direction in which I was standing, and discovered me. The bare sight of me seemed to throw him instantly into a state of frenzy. He--it is impossible for me to repeat the language that he used: it is bad enough to have heard it. I believe, Sir Patrick, but for the two men, who ran up and laid hold of him, that Hester Dethridge would have seen what she expected to see. The change in him was so frightful--even to me, well as I thought I knew him in his fits of passion--I tremble when I think of it. One of the men who had restrained him was almost as brutal, in his way. He declared, in the foulest language, that if Delamayn had a fit, he would lose the race, and that I should be answerable for it. But for Mr. Speedwell, I don't know what I should have done. He came forward directly. 'This is no place either for you, or for me,' he said--and gave me his arm, and led me back to the house. Hester Dethridge met us in the passage, and lifted her hand to stop me. Mr. Speedwell asked her what she wanted. She looked at me, and then looked toward the garden, and made the motion of striking a blow with her clenched fist. For the first time in my experience of her--I hope it was my fancy--I thought I saw her smile. Mr. Speedwell took me out. 'They are well matched in that house,' he said. 'The woman is as complete a savage as the men.' The carriage which I had seen waiting at the door was his. He called it up, and politely offered me a place in it. I said I would only trespass on his kindness as far as to the railway station. While we were talking, Hester Dethridge followed us to the door. She made the same motion again with her clenched hand, and looked back toward the garden--and then looked at me, and nodded her head, as much as to say, 'He will do it yet!' No words can describe how glad I was to see the last of her. I hope and trust I shall never set eyes on her again!"

"Did you hear how Mr. Speedwell came to be at the house? Had he gone of his own accord? or had he been sent for?"

"He had been sent for. I ventured to speak to him about the persons whom I had seen in the garden. Mr. Speedwell explained everything which I was not

able of myself to understand, in the kindest manner. One of the two strange men in the garden was the trainer; the other was a doctor, whom the trainer was usually in the habit of consulting. It seems that the real reason for their bringing Geof frey Delamayn away from Scotland when they did, was that the trainer was uneasy, and wanted to be near London for medical advice. The doctor, on being consulted, owned that he was at a loss to understand the symptoms which he was asked to treat. He had himself fetched the great surgeon to Fulham, that morning. Mr. Speedwell abstained from mentioning that he had foreseen what would happen, at Windygates. All he said was, 'I had met Mr. Delamayn in society, and I felt interest enough in the case to pay him a visit--with what result, you have seen yourself.'"

"Did he tell you any thing about Delamayn's health?"

"He said that he had questioned the doctor on the way to Fulham, and that some of the patient's symptoms indicated serious mischief. What the symptoms were I did not hear. Mr. Speedwell only spoke of changes for the worse in him which a woman would be likely to understand. At one time, he would be so dull and heedless that nothing could rouse him. At another, he flew into the most terrible passions without any apparent cause. The trainer had found it almost impossible (in Scotland) to keep him to the right diet; and the doctor had only sanctioned taking the house at Fulham, after being first satisfied, not only of the convenience of the garden, but also that Hester Dethridge could be thoroughly trusted as a cook. With her help, they had placed him on an entirely new diet. But they had found an unexpected difficulty even in doing that. When the trainer took him to the new lodgings, it turned out that he had seen Hester Dethridge at Windygates, and had taken the strongest prejudice against her. On seeing her again at Fulham, he appeared to be absolutely terrified."

"Terrified? Why?"

"Nobody knows why. The trainer and the doctor together could only prevent his leaving the house, by threatening to throw up the responsibility of preparing him for the race, unless he instantly controlled himself, and behaved like a man instead of a child. Since that time, he has become reconciled, little by little, to his new abode--partly through Hester Dethridge's caution in keeping herself always out of his way; and partly through his own appreciation of the change in his diet, which Hester's skill in cookery has enabled the doctor to make. Mr. Speedwell mentioned some things which I have forgotten. I can only repeat, Sir Patrick, the result at which he has arrived in his own mind. Coming from a man of his authority, the opinion seems to me to be startling in the last degree. If Geoffrey

Delamayn runs in the race on Thursday next, he will do it at the risk of his life."

"At the risk of dying on the ground?"

"Yes."

Sir Patrick's face became thoughtful. He waited a little before he spoke again.

"We have not wasted our time," he said, "in dwelling on what happened during your visit to Fulham. The possibility of this man's death suggests to my mind serious matter for consideration. It is very desirable, in the interests of my niece and her husband, that I should be able to foresee, if I can, how a fatal result of the race might affect the inquiry which is to be held on Saturday next. I believe you may be able to help me in this."

"You have only to tell me how, Sir Patrick."

"I may count on your being present on Saturday?"

"Certainly."

"You thoroughly understand that, in meeting Blanche, you will meet a person estranged from you, for the present--a friend and sister who has ceased (under Lady Lundie's influence mainly) to feel as a friend and sister toward you now?"

"I was not quite unprepared, Sir Patrick, to hear that Blanche had misjudged me. When I wrote my letter to Mr. Brinkworth, I warned him as delicately as I could, that his wife's jealousy might be very easily roused. You may rely on my self-restraint, no matter how hardly it may be tried. Nothing that Blanche can say or do will alter my grateful remembrance of the past. While I live, I love her. Let that assurance quiet any little anxiety that you may have felt as to my conduct--and tell me how I can serve those interests which I have at heart as well as you."

"You can serve them, Miss Silvester, in this way. You can make me acquainted with the position in which you stood toward Delamayn at the time when you went to the Craig Fernie inn."

"Put any questions to me that you think right, Sir Patrick."

"You mean that?"

"I mean it."

"I will begin by recalling something which you have already told me. Delamayn has promised you marriage--"

"Over and over again!"

"In words?"

"Yes."

"In writing?"

"Yes."

"Do you see what I am coming to?"

"Hardly yet."

"You referred, when we first met in this room, to a letter which you recovered from Bishopriggs, at Perth. I have ascertained from Arnold Brinkworth that the sheet of note-paper stolen from you contained two letters. One was written by you to Delamayn--the other was written by Delamayn to you. The substance of this last Arnold remembered. Your letter he had not read. It is of the utmost importance, Miss Silvester, to let me see that correspondence before we part to-day."

Anne made no answer. She sat with her clasped hands on her lap. Her eyes looked uneasily away from Sir Patrick's face, for the first time.

"Will it not be enough," she asked, after an interval, "if I tell you the substance of my letter, without showing it?"

"It will not be enough," returned Sir Patrick, in the plainest manner. "I hinted--if you remember--at the propriety of my seeing the letter, when you first mentioned it, and I observed that you purposely abstained from understanding me, I am grieved to put you, on this occasion, to a painful test. But if you are to help me at this serious crisis, I have shown you the way."

Anne rose from her chair, and answered by putting the letter into Sir

Patrick's hands. "Remember what he has done, since I wrote that," she said. "And try to excuse me, if I own that I am ashamed to show it to you now."

With those words she walked aside to the window. She stood there, with her hand pressed on her breast, looking out absently on the murky London view of house roof and chimney, while Sir Patrick opened the letter.

It is necessary to the right appreciation of events, that other eyes besides Sir Patrick's should follow the brief course of the correspondence in this place.

1. From Anne Silvester to Geoffrey Delamayn.

WINDYGATES HOUSE. August 19, 1868.

"GEOFFREY DELAMAYN,--I have waited in the hope that you would ride over from your brother's place, and see me--and I have waited in vain. Your conduct to me is cruelty itself; I will bear it no longer. Consider! in your own interests, consider--before you drive the miserable woman who has trusted you to despair. You have promised me marriage by all that is sacred. I claim your promise. I insist on nothing less than to be what you vowed I should be--what I have waited all this weary time to be--what I am, in the sight of Heaven, your wedded wife. Lady Lundie gives a lawn-party here on the 14th. I know you have been asked. I expect you to accept her invitation. If I don't see you, I won't answer for what may happen. My mind is made up to endure this suspense no longer. Oh, Geoffrey, remember the past! Be faithful--be just--to your loving wife,

"ANNE SILVESTER."

2. From Geoffrey Delamayn to Anne Silvester.

"DEAR ANNE,--Just called to London to my father. They have telegraphed him in a bad way. Stop where you are, and I will write you. Trust the bearer. Upon my soul, I'll keep my promise. Your loving husband that is to be,

"GEOFFREY DELAMAYN.

"WINDYGATES HOUSE Augt. 14, 4 P. M.

"In a mortal hurry. The train starts 4.30."

Sir Patrick read the correspondence with breathless attention to the end. At the last lines of the last letter he did what he had not done for twenty years

past--he sprang to his feet at a bound, and he crossed a room without the help of his ivory cane.

Anne started; and turning round from the window, looked at him in silent surprise. He was under the influence of strong emotion; his face, his voice, his manner, all showed it.

"How long had you been in Scotland, when you wrote this?" He pointed to Anne's letter as he asked the question, put ting it so eagerly that he stammered over the first words. "More than three weeks?" he added, with his bright black eyes fixed in absorbing interest on her face.

"Yes."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I am certain of it."

"You can refer to persons who have seen you?"

"Easily."

He turned the sheet of note-paper, and pointed to Geoffrey's penciled letter on the fourth page.

"How long had he been in Scotland, when he wrote this? More than three weeks, too?"

Anne considered for a moment.

"For God's sake, be careful!" said Sir Patrick. "You don't know what depends on this, If your memory is not clear about it, say so."

"My memory was confused for a moment. It is clear again now. He had been at his brother's in Perthshire three weeks before he wrote that. And before he went to Swanhaven, he spent three or four days in the valley of the Esk."

"Are you sure again?"

"Quite sure!"

"Do you know of any one who saw him in the valley of the Esk?"

"I know of a person who took a note to him, from me."

"A person easily found?"

"Quite easily."

Sir Patrick laid aside the letter, and seized in ungovernable agitation on both her hands.

"Listen to me," he said. "The whole conspiracy against Arnold Brinkworth and you falls to the ground before that correspondence. When you and he met at the inn--"

He paused, and looked at her. Her hands were beginning to tremble in his.

"When you and Arnold Brinkworth met at the inn," he resumed, "the law of Scotland had made you a married woman. On the day, and at the hour, when he wrote those lines at the back of your letter to him, you were Geoffrey Delamayn's wedded wife!"

He stopped, and looked at her again.

Without a word in reply, without the slightest movement in her from head to foot, she looked back at him. The blank stillness of horror was in her face. The deadly cold of horror was in her hands.

In silence, on his side, Sir Patrick drew back a step, with a faint reflection of her dismay in his face. Married--to the villain who had not hesitated to calumniate the woman whom he had ruined, and then to cast her helpless on the world. Married--to the traitor who had not shrunk from betraying Arnold's trust in him, and desolating Arnold's home. Married--to the ruffian who would have struck her that morning, if the hands of his own friends had not held him back. And Sir Patrick had never thought of it! Absorbed in the one idea of Blanche's future, he had never thought of it, till that horror-stricken face looked at him, and said, Think of my future, too!

He came back to her. He took her cold hand once more in his.

"Forgive me," he said, "for thinking first of Blanche."

Blanche's name seemed to rouse her. The life came back to her face; the tender brightness began to shine again in her eyes. He saw that he might venture to speak more plainly still: he went on.

"I see the dreadful sacrifice as you see it. I ask myself, have I any right, has Blanche any right--"

She stopped him by a faint pressure of his hand.

"Yes," she said, softly, "if Blanche's happiness depends on it."